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ABSTRACT

The English spoken in India is too close to standard English to be characterized as a separate variety. Although phonological variations give English in India some regional flavors, they do not have any structural or semantic base and do not constitute a new language. Cultural differences have not caused English-language literature written in India to be significantly different from that written by British and North American authors. The English spoken in different parts of India is mutually intelligible. At most, English in India might be regarded as a dialect of British English. Archaic style and colloquialisms, the most commonly referred-to variations from standard English usage, are more appropriately regarded as fossilizations that may disappear as access to standard usage broadens. Borrowings and coinages of Indian origin do exist, but English morphemes using Indian root-words have not gained acceptance. The lack of native English speakers teaching English in India has probably added to the erroneous perception of English in India as a separate language. Less attention should be paid to the linguistic aspects of English in India, and more attention should be given to the contributions of literature to the richness of the language. (MSE)

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ENGLISH IN INDIA:
NEED FOR A REAPPRAISAL.

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In a vast sub-continent like India with 700 million people of diverse races and origins, users of English number about 15 million - roughly two percent of the entire population. Compared to the different English-speaking communities scattered throughout the world it is quite a large number.

However, these 15 million people do not depend upon English alone: literally most of them acquire it at secondary and even tertiary levels. Thus the fact that English in India is used mainly by already literate and educated persons is to a great extent responsible for the prestige and recognition this language enjoys.

In this paper my contention is that English in India may not be dubbed as 'Indian English' or 'Indi~~g~~ish' or 'Hinglish', as some might fancy.

The basic aspects of English in India are functional and not structural or semantic. English in India is 'functionally a major language serving as a socio-political link' and (a most powerful link) as well as a medium of instruction. The 'Indian-ness' is seen as an effect of the speaker's mother tongue: it is especially noticeable in the fields of phonology, accent and occasional phrasings. Millions in India freely converse in English, read, write and prepare material in English for various usages, and even translate from or into English. This wide anchorage is an inevitable sequel to facts of history and cannot be wished out of existence.

Differing phonological and accent variations give to English in India some interesting regional colours and flavours. Comparing notes and accents with puckered smiles is a favourite pastime of most Indian students of English. But these regional centrifugal tendencies without any structural and semantic base do not constitute any new language. To hunt for and accord the status of 'Indian English' to just one of such tendencies would be naive and even self-defeating. The regional varieties serve as antithesis to the concept of any transcendently 'Indian English': standard English in India has always tended to remain close to RP English and no new nomenclature is called for.

The differences in setting, culture and situations alone, without lexical, semantic and structural support systems, cannot cut off creative literature written in English in India from the same written in England. The logic behind such claims, if allowed, might lead to exclusion of writers like Burns and Scott, Fitzgerald and Conrad, and even the famous Americans.

That Indians from different parts of the country speak and write English that is mutually intelligible is not so primal a cause as to lead to a new language called 'Indian English'. Intelligibility exists as a result of an awareness of regional phonological and accent variations; everyone allows margins in the use of English by another group.

At best, English in India may be regarded as a dialect of English. Isn't it lucky that Chaucer wrote in a dialect that proved to be the line that modern English took? Or else he might have been assigned to the dungheaps of dry scholarship. And do we accord language status to the dialects and registers that exist in England? Does anyone even think of a register as a language? Isn't it strange that what passes for a dialect in England should pass for a complete new language in India?

The standard that Indian English is supposed to have is that of the English as used by the national Papers in India, and the quality of English that the Press in India uses is always very close to RP English rather than any geographical variety in the sub-continent. The quantum of prestige attached is directly related to its proximity to RP English.

The oriental and exotic colour that English in India has acquired is due to its wide use of Indian names, terms, events, festivals and cultural features. 'Officialese', 'Baboo English' and phonetic regional variants characterise the English used in India as rather 'functional and middle-brow'² indicating socio-cultural parameters that vary even in England.

The paraded differences between English in India and English English (I beg your pardon for having to use this term!) include the Indian variety showing a marked preference for the archaic and the ornate Victorian style. It is seen as 'too formal and stilted'. Awkward colloquialisms existing side by side with anachronistic uses are cited as so many proofs of its being a separate language. It is conveniently forgotten that acquisition of English by a foreign group of learners at L-2 and L-3 levels with the help of teachers themselves trained in an era of Victorian hangover must inevitably appear archaic to modern English users. This is not through

'preference' but situational compulsions still preserved by lack of means and even access to modern situations that such an archaism has emerged as a feature. It is not choice but lack of it that seems to lead to fossilization tendencies being paraded as features of a new variety of English. This artificial distinction is but ephemeral and bound to vanish as accessibility increases. Desire and capacity are there.

It is in the fields of lexico-grammatical and accent deviations that many local coinages are seen sneaking into English in India. This is not a new phenomenon. Even in England use of topical, regional and anachronistic phrases and idioms have pushed so many works of art into obsolescence. Some of these local coinages with local colour and flavour are likely to stay for good, ultimately enriching English language. It has been so in the past, too. Or else the English language of today would never have been what it is.

Oxford English Dictionary reveals that about one thousand words and coinages of Indian origin have gained acceptance in English. Rather than claiming to found any new language these one thousand words further embellish the English language and also prove the organic two-way relationship that has existed between India and England. It is not at all like the uni-directional affairs that French or Latin borrowings indicate. English today is the sum total of this uninterrupted process of borrowing from other languages and enjoys a rare variety, flexibility and resilience that no other language in the world displays.

We would confine our remarks to the extent that borrowings do not make for a new language nor accents alone mark one as such. Dialect spoken in one region may not be fully intelligible in another. But that should not lead to the erroneous conclusion that the different dialects are so many languages. Any such tendentious inferences would be sadly misleading.

English morphemes used with Indian root-words have not gained acceptability at all: they simply provide material to be laughed at and enjoyed stealthily just as the English novels were about two hundred years ago. Such morphological features carry no prestige at all: in fact they damage that of the user. To dub English used in India as 'Indian English' is to make a virtue of a severe limitation arising out of such sorry hybridizations. It is therefore, that we favour English written, spoken and used in India with local colour and flavour to be recognised as a regional variant of 'English English' rather than as a language in its own right.

English writings in India show the same characteristics and tendencies that English writings show in England: the influence of situation, context, purpose and attitude would always weigh strongly with writers in any language in any country. The fact that Indian writers in English write about things Indian and rarely about things British shows simply that they remain true to their milieu, broadening the horizons of English English and enabling it to truly become a world language. Efforts to compartmentalize it into so many 'languages' (Australian, African, Indian, American...) and prevent access to the literature of England proper would only serve to alienate the emotional and cultural urge to come close together and help create a world society. The regional varieties are not so many satellites revolving round a Sun but just varieties of the same language, albeit picked up at L-2 and L-3 levels.

The process of language learning may start with a study of literary texts providing an eloquent model of various linguistic forms. The study of literature increases and heightens the readers' awareness and appreciation of the culture from which a particular literature has flowered. Enjoyment of literature would lead to more of it which would ultimately increase reading proficiency. "A literary experience is also a language learning experience"³ since people tend to remember what interests them deeply rather than superficially.

The traditional process of learning involves greater involvement of the mind as we move ~~away~~ from the familiar to the not-so-familiar and from thereon to the world of the unfamiliar. Method and matter do help expedite the process, but the principle remains the same. The process resembles an inverted pyramid in structure.

When a foreign language like English is to be learnt a set of socio-cultural parameters help overcome conceptual barriers and establish communication. This communicative link often undergoes stresses and strains causing occasional blackouts. This is because of the pyramidal inversion of the linguistic edifice (referred to in the preceding paragraph,) constantly in need of props, as part of the structure here and there develops cracks or the line of gravitational pull disturbed by new researches and findings.

The difficulties in case of an Indian learner of English are great owing to several factors, not the least among them being the fact that probably he has never come in contact with native English speakers. He is very often swayed off-balance by the mother-tongue effect as seen through regional variations in accent, intonation, phonology and morphology.

However, lexical and semantic currents strongly bind such regional aberrations together into what we have been made to accept as the Indian variety of English.

Too much emphasis on linguistics, at the cost of accompanying literature of the community, gives rise to numerous stunted varieties, the regional or zonal Englishes. We have now American English, Indian, African, Caribbean, Australian and so many other Englishes that 'English English' has been lost somewhere in the jungle!

These different varieties are simply social and functional. The linguistic and semantic structures remain the same. Except housing the widely different socio-cultural features and regional aspirations these regional varieties have nothing else to distinguish them from 'English English'. Here and there are interspersed words and phrases of local dialects. But that is not enough to differentiate them from English 'pure'. Except some examples that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch gave of 'pure' native Anglo-Saxon English can we find even one sentence with the same degree of purity?

Differences rather than similarities, contrasts rather than the underlying unity, with new jargonistic terms and phraseology are being peddled through numerous journals catching unwary young and eager minds into the trammels of an easily picked up technical verbosity called 'linguistics'. We tend to forget that the learning of a language is not an intellectual exercise but a skill; even tiny tots possess this skill, helped by their mothers.

The pull of the mother tongue frequently retards our learning and understanding a foreign or second language. Deeply ingrained habits of a particular style of phrasing our expressions, accent, intonation and cultural nuances go over into the L-2 we are trying to learn. The resultant language mutants are interesting to observe but abhorring in retention, since that would amount to encouraging fissiparous tendencies in a world where all intellectual activities tend to come closer. And no mutants or aberrations should be allowed to take us away from the original standard, as otherwise we would always have to hover in the peripheral areas. Most unfortunately this is precisely what is happening throughout the world at the moment. The regional mutants and hybrids are not the 'real thing'.

It is not that English English is so hallowed or difficult to learn that foreigners and non-native learners of English had better keep aloof! Occasionally there might be lack of communication between an Englishman and a foreigner speaking English, but this rather temporary phenomenon might be

attributed to the interaction between the ~~native~~ native concepts and thought-processes of the two speakers. A certain level of sharing of ideas learned through literary approaches may help overcome lack of intelligibility.

I shall give just one piece of a dialogue incorporating mother tongue effects. A student who has just taken a test is talking to his teacher. I hope you would be able to understand what they are talking about.

"I have written the exam, sir. Will you cut our copies?"

"Did you write the critical appreciation of Lucy Gray? I hope you wrote the precis also?"

"Yes sir, but I could not catch the explanations".

"What are you going to do now?"

"I am thinking of writing the teacher course in English."

"Yes, I think you will pull out somehow. Teachery is very hard to do, you know."

It is not English, and yet ~~it~~ it is. But we certainly call it 'Indian English' too.

Interest in linguistics has risen so much during the last few decades that variants of any language or even a dialect would attract hordes of scholars who would be easily swayed by a set of readymade phrases following easy goals often set by themselves. When we were school and college students the aim was to come in contact with literature through grammar and language studies. The situation later reversed and various factors led to shifting of emphasis from literature to language or linguistics. We simply went to the other extreme.

A recent balancing disillusionment with a discipline like linguistics being studied in piecemeal fashion makes the time rather ripe for a call inviting attention back to literature and relegating language studied to the status of a medium or a vehicle, which, in deed, it needs must be.

Overemphasizing linguistics or English language, for that matter, would keep the non-English learners of English at bay, at a distance from the Island a living contact with which is the cherished aim of every foreign learner. To every student of English in other countries England beacons and flashes signals of invitation like Mecca to ~~the~~ the devout!

Now, if understanding and enjoyment are the twin goals of literary activity, 'understanding' alone through linguistics would not do. It may lead to enjoyment but only after the communication is complete. And communication cannot be complete without a living contact with the language one is

trying to pick up. Various social, cultural, historical and conceptual factors have to be shared first before a proper appreciation and enjoyment are possible. Linguistics, as the only available recourse to a group of foreign learners might very often frustrate this cherished goal of learning the language and literature of a country.

I may be excused, but I cannot help thinking that through an excessive emphasis on linguistics attention is being weaned away from literature, from the original target to a decoy - a sorry trend emblematic of a rare kind of imperialistic exclusivism, denying to non-English writers the same place that may be granted to a parallel English writer.

This exclusivism of a sub-conscious nature probably springs from a fear of literary and cultural contamination of sorts, a fear symbolic of a backlash aimed at survival. The whole exercise is indicative of a complex - dotting the globe with so many varieties of English and retaining the original and the brightest dot right on the Island!

No harm is envisaged for any interest-group. But even I, insignificant as I am - a mere teacher, get mad at the way the thick foliage in the dense jungle of linguistics prevents the light of literature from reaching us.

It is hightime someone called a halt to this aimless intellectual pastime continuing at a feverish pitch and frustrating meaningful contact with literature and confusing the means with the ends. Linguistics must further literary communication and not ignore or deny it. Once the perspective is set right the mushroom growth of language teaching shops would be cut down, properly regulated and hooked on to the study of literature. If the different Englishes from all corners of the world have one thing in common or should have it so, it is the great heritage of The Bible and Shakespeare. It is this shared spirit that should bind. A mere linguistic aspect should be viewed as just a vehicle for the great ideas.

Rather than leave the foreign learners of English exposed to indigenous background, they should be provided with English socio-cultural settings to make the language-learning schemes work faster. Literature can help genuine language-learning processes by providing the right settings. A graded and increasingly more visible literary setting may be fruitfully utilised for the teaching of English as a foreign language or as a second language to foreigners. This would be possible after we decide finally whether we want literature through language or language through literature.

Literature may bend or even break lexico-grammatical rules. But, language, the hand-maiden, cannot. Literature has frequently deviated from accepted communicative norms to establish new ways and relationships. The linguistic vehicle is needed simply to help literature being understood. That is its be-all and end-all.

Stylistics, however, does offer insights into the study of literature. Stylistic analysis aimed at the teaching of literature works through integration of stylistic and literary values. Too much stress on linguistic analysis alone lessens the intrinsic value of literature. It is therefore that language and literature must be brought together in a proper perspective of accepted values. The study of literature is thus expected to cover language studies too. In this context some persons have supposed literature to serve the following functions in particular:

- I. It provides training in critical sensibility and scholarly analysis. (The students are brought to appreciate the values, moral and aesthetic, which it transmits.)
- II. It offers a vehicle for cognitive or cultural content.
- III. It provides 'texts', to be subjected to linguistic or stylistic analysis.
- IV. It provides stimulus to interaction between students in English, thus simultaneously improving their skills in the language, involving them actively with texts.⁴

The task of the teacher becomes difficult as he has to impart not only the linguistic ability and skills to understand the literary texts but to properly read and enjoy the same. Textual meaning is made intelligible through language analysis, no doubt, but analysis and comparison take us farther on the road to literary appreciation where linguistics cannot help. Even if the teacher only transmits to his class what little he knows he would be giving them something at least an outlook shared by great literary minds. This is no mean task in itself.

Since English literature written in English language is one, in spite of so many paraded variants, the different linguistic variants, too, may be seen as tributaries "contributing to the richness and resources of the language as a whole" as in the past.⁵

This language as a whole cannot be broken into fragments and its speakers huddled into so many geographical and regional compartments. If English as used in India has an

'Indian-ness' in it, this 'Indian-ness' ultimately enriches English language itself by adhering to it as an integral part of its global colour scheme rather than claiming to be any technically viable language in its own right.

The fact that some critics and scholars advocate liberal and sympathetic principles formulating a closer obeisance to Indian (and Pakistani) English⁶ is a further proof of the same exclusivistic temperament noted earlier. They are able to camouflage their attitude very cleverly when they 'fear' that a desire to adhere to English as an Indian language might diminish the status of other Indian languages! They very subtly try to implant a sense of superiority in the minds of those who would like to turn their mediocrity ~~in~~ in acquiring English to account and not even notice their being pushed out of the original 'English' arena. No wonder many^{of us} in India have been waylaid into thinking that Indian English is a separate entity and^{are} wasting our time, energy and efforts over an analytical study and codification of the regional varieties of the 'means' and not bother at all about the 'ends'. Many of us are still spilling our energy in convincing one another that Indian English does not diminish the status of other Indian languages and hence should be promoted and encouraged as an independent variety!

English in India does need to be promoted for a variety of reasons, and some of them have been already stated in the foregoing paragraphs, but certainly not simply because it is another 'Indian' language.

Let us call a spade a spade. Impoverished as we^{were} left through centuries of subordination, we must not give up the advantages that English may offer to us. We are sticking to English, to more and more of it, because it is the one effective way in which we may make up for the lost opportunities, by remaining in touch with what is going on in the world. The first Indian Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, thought it inadvisable to give up or shut out this "window on the world" and once again get "into an intellectual prison after achieving political freedom"⁷.

My contention is backed by a recently growing interest in English literature, its study and interpretation, seen as a swingback in reaction to the fervour that bestormed the people and made them pay attention to language study alone.

The task of promoting so many regional languages, so many regional Englishes, is seen as a sorry inertial continuation of the imperialistic temperament: the hold on the mind is more abiding than the hold of a materialistic nature.

It is precisely a fear of this subjugation that makes

lesser mortals cry 'wolf' to English. This is symptomatic of one's own weaknesses that need protection through narrow jingoistic slogans. But it will be a sad day, in deed, when we succumb to narrow political considerations and reject the social and cultural contents of a discipline that must needs lead to acquisition of artistic and literary values enriching life itself.

To come back to the point. The regional varieties or mutants of English are being encouraged from both sides: one side doing it out of an exclusivistic temperament noted earlier, and the other side out of fear that grips mediocre minds afraid of rich temptations. Within these two flanks is seen the meandering varieties of lesser Englishes the world over.

Literary competence requires a rather advanced level of language-awareness and a proper utilisation of linguistic skills. This, however, should strike a harmonious rather than a discordant note. A firmer re-assertion of literature-texts at the first degree level can take care of linguistic requirements also. The linguistic structure of poetry, for example, is so arranged that words and phrases frequently move beyond the conventional range of meaning and hint at ideas and thoughts which often defy explanations and continue to haunt the mind. A simple linguistic approach will not achieve this. Even the most elementary linear structure must often be bending the grammatical expectancies. Poetry, thus, (to quote from a review,) "both destroys (the structure of the ordinary language) and creates (a new structure of additional values"⁸. And literary competence admittedly "involves the use of communication-awareness, language-consciousness, analytical skills and a critical metalanguage"⁹

It is through stylistic analysis that language-function justifies~~xxx~~ its study in literature, and that too, as a means, a tool. It may become a bit more difficult for foreign learners of English to appreciate and enjoy the rewards of literature, but that is no reason why we should be turned away from the portals: exclusivism would lead to endemic trends, a kind of in-breeding - attractive to begin with, but suicidal in its ultimate effects. It is not language studies but pursuit of literature that brings people closer in their search for a universal excellence of life-style based on a set of shared values.

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